

Preliminary Summary of Results from the Burnt Fork Fish Trap - 2013

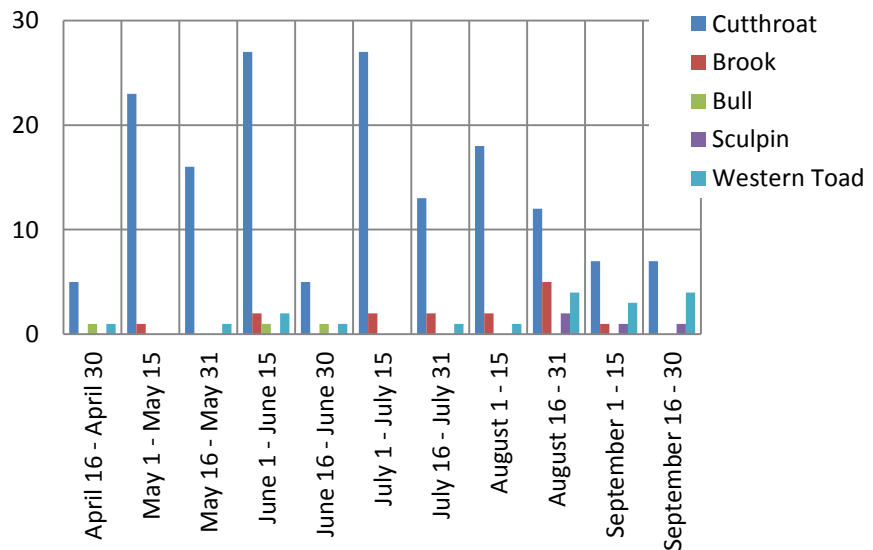


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Fall 2013
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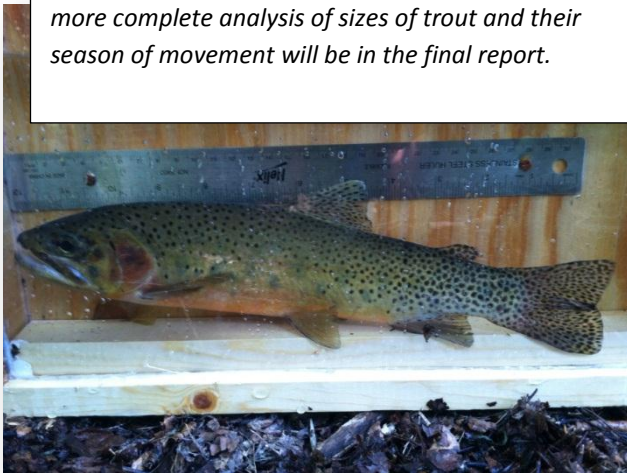
Preliminary Summary

In summer of 2009 the Forest Service's fish screw trap was operated at the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge, near the mouth of Burnt Fork at the Bitterroot River. Although hundreds of fish were caught and released near the mouth of Burnt Fork, the trap failed to capture any native trout. We know that upstream, on the Bitterroot National

Numbers of Individuals Captured
in two-week intervals from April 15 to Sept 30



This cutthroat trout was one of the largest caught. A more complete analysis of sizes of trout and their season of movement will be in the final report.

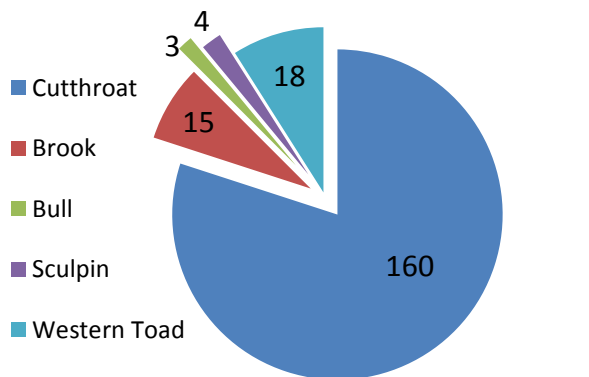


Forest lands (Forest), there is a robust native bull trout and native cutthroat trout population (in River Miles 16 through 27). We also know that downstream of the Forest, especially in RM 0.1 to 8, there are water diversions and barriers to fish movement.

The fish trap was used to begin to

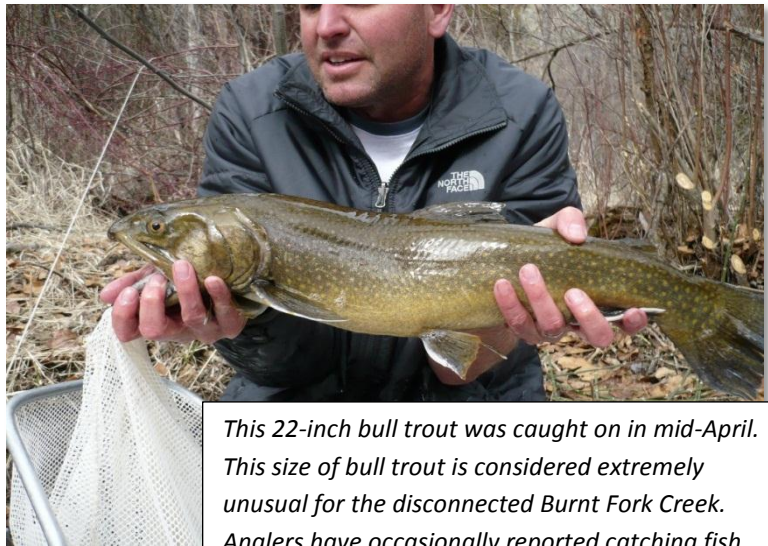
answer questions related to whether the native trout on the Forest are heading towards the river as they would have historically. Or are the fish on the National Forest staying on the Forest? If fish do leave the Forest and head toward the river, what are the conditions when this is occurring, what size (age) are the fish, and what species is moving?

Numbers of Individual
Fish and Toads Captured
April 15 - Sept 30



The rotary screw fish trap was placed at Burnt Fork of the Bitterroot River above the upper irrigation diversion and downstream of the, native fish dominated headwaters. The trap operated from April 15 to September 30th, 2013. The trap ran through high water in May and functioned, though minimally, through low water in summer. Funding was secured from Montana Trout Foundation by the Forest Service to operate the Forest Service's fish screw trap. The landowner's employees operated the fish trap for most of the working season.

Cutthroat trout were consistently captured; 160 trout in 177 days. There were recaptures of some cutthroat trout. Bull trout and sculpin were rarely captured. Brook trout, the only non-native species caught in the trap, were more common than bull trout, but infrequently trapped. Western toads were captured eighteen times.



This 22-inch bull trout was caught on in mid-April. This size of bull trout is considered extremely unusual for the disconnected Burnt Fork Creek. Anglers have occasionally reported catching fish approaching this size.

The data clearly demonstrate that there is movement of native trout in the downstream direction. The movement of cutthroat trout was much more consistent than expected. One large bull trout that was 22 inches (565 mm) in length was captured. This was the largest bull trout that anyone has seen in this system or reported in this stream system.

This is a preliminary report. A final report with maps and improved descriptions of the results is expected in spring 2014. Information from the season's fish trapping would not have occurred without funding from the Montana Trout Foundation, and the data has already proved useful for the Bitterroot National Forest and many partners that care for Montana's trout.

Images of Burnt Fork Creek in early May 2013 depict the amount of water left in the creek after diversions. Left is the creek in the lower watershed (river mile 3) and right is the creek at the trap location (RM 12).

